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Annual report on the evaluation function and major evaluations

Summary

This annual report has been prepared in accordance with the revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2013/14) and relevant Executive Board decisions. The report provides information on global developments in evaluation and the current state of the evaluation function in UNICEF, concentrating on evaluation activities at regional level.

A draft decision is included in section IX.

* E/ICEF/2014/5.

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I. Introduction

1. "UN Results — Are we achieving them? How do we know?" This was the title of a high-level event hosted by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in New York in April 2013. In opening the event, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon confirmed that accountability and results were his "number one priority" for the United Nations. He went on to say: "Every good manager must make the effort to look ahead and look behind and determine the effects, intended and unintended, of our work."[1]

2. Evaluation can play a key role in measuring and validating the achievement of results and in analysing performance and results in terms of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. It is intended to support organizational learning, accountability and transparency, and to provide well-founded evidence to underpin sound decision-making and advocacy. In UNICEF, evaluation aims to support stronger organizational performance and results, leading to real improvements in the lives of children around the world.

3. Evaluation must itself be managed efficiently and effectively. This requires that the evaluation function be properly constituted and given sufficient resources and support. This report provides an overview of the status of the evaluation function at UNICEF in 2013. It first considers UNICEF engagement with evaluation activities in the United Nations system and more widely, and then reviews the performance, results and resource base of the evaluation function in UNICEF. This is followed by reporting on aspects of evaluation organization and activities, mainly at regional level.

II. Governance of the evaluation function

4. In recent years, the UNICEF Executive Board has paid particular attention to the organization's evaluation function, affirming its central role. In decision 2013/13, the Executive Board approved the revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2013/14) and emphasized that the Evaluation Office would continue to report directly to the Executive Board through the annual report on the evaluation function. The revised Evaluation Policy responded to Executive Board requests for clarity concerning accountabilities for evaluation, including the provision of human and financial resources for evaluation and the use of evaluation results at all levels in the organization. The policy also addresses the wishes of the Executive Board regarding coherence on evaluation activities in the United Nations system as well as support for and use of national evaluation systems.

5. In 2013, evaluation reports were presented to the Executive Board on UNICEF work on early childhood development, life skills education and the human rights-based approach to programming. A synthesis report on evaluations of humanitarian action undertaken by UNICEF was also discussed. Management responses were presented for each evaluation. The *Plan for Global Thematic Evaluations 2014-2017* was also discussed at an informal meeting of Executive Board members in December.

[1] Statement by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Evaluation Week 2013 meeting organized by UNEG (video).

6. The internal UNICEF Evaluation Committee met in February for consultations on revisions to the Evaluation Policy and in September on proposals for global thematic evaluations for the period 2014-2017.

7. The functional independence of the Evaluation Office is recognized and respected by management. The office's staff experienced no inappropriate pressures or constraints in fulfilling their responsibilities.

III. System-wide evaluation coherence within the United Nations

Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system: evaluation

8. The United Nations General Assembly resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) makes frequent references to evaluation.[2] The resolution emphasizes the importance of evaluation and the use of the evidence it produces. It calls for evaluation plans to be aligned with the new corporate strategic plans of the funds and programmes and for strengthening evaluation capacities within both United Nations entities and national evaluation systems. It emphasizes the need for effective arrangements for independent system-wide evaluation.

9. UNICEF has recognized the importance of responding to these points. Implementation of the revised Evaluation Policy will further strengthen the UNICEF evaluation system and help in sustaining support for development of national evaluation capacity. UNICEF has aligned the *Plan for Global Thematic Evaluations 2014-2017*[3] with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017.

10. UNICEF also provided technical advice on independent system-wide evaluation. The *Policy for Independent System-wide Evaluation of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System* (2013) has now been approved, and preparations for two system-wide pilot evaluations are under way. Although much remains to be done, this marks significant progress towards increased independent evaluation coverage of the United Nations system.

United Nations Evaluation Group

11. An external assessment of UNEG conducted in 2012 concluded that it had served well in setting evaluation standards, defining norms and providing useful technical guidance papers, and that there was now an opportunity to enhance its relevance by reaching out to wider audiences within the United Nations system and beyond.[4] UNICEF contributed to formulation of the new, more assertive *UNEG Strategy 2014-2019*, which identifies four strategic objectives:

(a) Evaluation functions and products of United Nations entities meet the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation;

(b) United Nations entities and partners use evaluation in support of accountability and programme learning;

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[2] A/RES/67/226.

[3] E/ICEF/2014/3.

[4] Jups Kluyskens and Carrol Faubert, *Independent Assessment of the United Nations Evaluation Group (2004-2012)*, 2013.

(c) Evaluation informs United Nations system-wide initiatives and emerging demands;

(d) UNEG benefits from and contributes to enhancing the global evaluation profession.

12. UNICEF believes that the strategy positions UNEG well to continue supporting its members and partners as they strengthen the independence, credibility and use of evaluation, while seeking a stronger 'upstream' role in influencing United Nations reform processes and engaging with the global evaluation community.

13. UNEG is already stepping up to this new role. The network hosted Evaluation Week in New York in April 2013, which included the high-level event mentioned in paragraph 1. It has also contributed to the independent system-wide evaluation initiative and has joined many other organizations and civil society partners in planning activities intended to raise the profile of evaluation around the globe in 2015, in a campaign designated the International Year of Evaluation.

14. Meanwhile, UNICEF continued through 2013 to engage in several UNEG activities geared at supporting harmonization of methods and approaches, notably:

(a) UNEG evaluation practice exchange: Held at UNICEF House in New York in April 2013 as part of Evaluation Week, this involved well over 100 United Nations evaluation staff who shared their experience and knowledge in a lively, highly interactive event. The organizing committee was co-chaired by UNICEF and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

(b) UNEG task force on joint evaluation: Co-chaired by UNICEF and OCHA, the task force finalized a resource pack on planning and managing joint evaluations.

(c) DAC/UNEG[5] peer review on the evaluation function of the World Food Programme: Chaired by the UNICEF evaluation director, this peer review was initiated in 2013 at the request of the World Food Programme and will be concluded in 2014 with submission of a report for consideration by its Executive Board and management.

Joint evaluations

15. Inter-agency and other joint evaluations can be very effective in drawing lessons and arriving at recommendations based on assessment of a broad range of experiences across several organizations, while attracting the attention of a wide audience and promoting concerted action on key issues. These evaluations provide a useful instrument to support shared learning and accountability for joint programmes. Although costs can be high, pooled funding reduces the expense to each agency, making it less than the cost of each agency conducting its own evaluation of the same programme or activity. The UNICEF Evaluation Office therefore continued to engage in joint evaluations through 2013. These included:

[5] DAC is the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

(a) *Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System*. Addressing an evidence gap regarding country-level joint gender programmes, this evaluation was jointly managed by the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund and the Governments of Norway and Spain. A joint management response was finalized in March 2014. The evaluation demonstrated the added value that joint gender programmes can bring as a development cooperation modality in the United Nations system, while reaching the important conclusion that they should not be considered the default option in addressing national gender equality requirements. It found that such programmes have not improved efficiency, mainly due to systemic barriers, unclear management arrangements and weak design processes. Valuable lessons were drawn with respect to strengthening the design and implementation of future joint gender programmes.

(b) *UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change*. The evaluation aimed to assess how far and in which contexts the joint programme had succeeded in accelerating the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting between 2008 and 2012. It found that the programme has contributed effectively at global, national and community levels, building on the synergies between levels to influence collective change. However, the impact of the programme can only be fully assessed in the longer term. A joint management response has been formulated, and the evaluation results are already informing preparations for a second phase of the joint programme. The evaluation results were taken up at a major international conference in Rome in October 2013 on action to achieve commitments in General Assembly resolution 67/146 on intensifying global efforts to eliminate female genital mutilations. Members of the Executive Boards of UNFPA and UNICEF also discussed the evaluation results in meetings held early in 2014.

IV. Evaluation coherence and capacity development at global level

16. UNICEF has a long and widely appreciated history of supporting development of national evaluation capacity at country level, and this work continues. At global level, this challenge is best met through the combined efforts of development partners. UNEG has played a role through its task force on national evaluation capacity development, co-chaired by UNICEF, which in 2013 distributed a publication titled 'Practical tips on how to strengthen national evaluation systems'.

17. UNICEF also recognizes the importance of engaging national partners more directly. In 2012 it worked with the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation[6] to set up a broad partnership under the name EvalPartners, with the aim of strengthening evaluation capacity in civil society organizations.[7] EvalPartners quickly attracted over 50 partners and significant funding from several donors. All

[6] An international partnership of national and regional evaluation associations that provides leadership in evaluation worldwide by encouraging demand for evaluation and supporting organizational capacity-strengthening for evaluation associations.

[7] www.mymande.org/evalpartners.

the regional evaluation associations have joined it, as have 34 national evaluation associations and a number of United Nations agencies, bilateral agencies, foundations, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations. At the end of 2012, EvalPartners convened a major international forum on civil society evaluation capacities to facilitate sharing of experience and good practices. The resulting material has now been published by UNICEF in two volumes.[8]

18. EvalPartners supported a wide range of activities in 2013, including work on advocacy, several innovative capacity-building initiatives and support for learning and training. The impressive and growing reach of the partnership is demonstrated by an e-learning programme on development evaluation. Originally launched in English in 2012, the course has been improved and has now been launched in Arabic, Russian and Spanish. Altogether, 20,457 participants registered for the course in 2013, compared with just over 9,000 in 2012. Many UNICEF staff have also enrolled, although the primary audience is external. Further details can be found on the MyM&E website, another highly successful EvalPartners initiative, which attracted over 457,000 visitors from almost 180 countries in 2013.[9]

19. EvalPartners has grown with astonishing speed. It addresses what is clearly a high level of unmet demand around the globe for information, skills and knowledge in development evaluation. With its focus on civil society, it complements other global initiatives for evaluation capacity development. At the end of 2013, UNICEF continued to be an active member of EvalPartners, while passing the baton as lead agency to UN-Women. Meanwhile, the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation is playing a growing role in managing the partnership.

20. UNICEF has also engaged in partnerships to strengthen evaluation in humanitarian action, notably with the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action. The focus is on improving both the quality of the humanitarian evidence base and evaluation capacity within the humanitarian system. Towards this end, UNICEF provided technical support for development of the network's *Pilot Guide on Evaluation of Humanitarian Action* (2013)[10] and is developing an e-learning course, jointly with the network and EvalPartners, on evaluating humanitarian action.

V. The evaluation function in UNICEF: performance and results

Introduction and overview

21. The information reported in this section mainly derives from the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS). It provides for independent assessment and rating of reports on country, regional and global evaluations; feedback on the quality of reports to offices; and compilation of performance information into a management information dashboard. GEROS quality ratings are based on careful, systematic assessments made by external reviewers using criteria based on UNEG standards.

[8] http://mymande.org/evalpartners/selected_books.

[9] www.mymande.org/evalpartners.

[10] www.alnap.org/resource/8229.

22. The GEROS system now functions well, and the Evaluation Office continues to update and strengthen it. In 2013, files in the global evaluation database and the management response tracking system were migrated to a more flexible and user-friendly software platform. The two databases were linked, facilitating access and improving system coherence.

23. A suite of six key performance indicators provides a general overview of performance trends in 2013, supplemented by information from previous years. Four major conclusions are warranted:

(a) The number of evaluations being conducted has recovered to a higher level, and topical coverage shows a shift towards more programmes spanning several sectors;

(b) Outcome/impact and summative evaluations have become a larger share of the portfolio, as desired. This may reflect the influence of data-gathering strategies from Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES), which reduces the need for output level and formative evaluations;

(c) Evaluation quality moved very positively in 2013 toward more good/excellent evaluations;

(d) UNICEF is maintaining a culture in which management responses to evaluations are routinely completed.

External review

24. An external assessment performed in 2013, *Review of UNICEF's Development Effectiveness 2009-2011*, included examination of the results measurement system in UNICEF. It was based on an examination of 62 UNICEF evaluation reports, selected to provide coverage broadly matching UNICEF programming. The review was conducted by external consultants commissioned by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the OECD-DAC Development Evaluation Network.[11] The review presented wide-ranging conclusions on UNICEF development effectiveness in the period under review and analysed the UNICEF evaluation function. It found:

(a) The UNICEF ratings of evaluation quality can be trusted. In terms of the overall quality of evaluation reports, the review agreed with the UNICEF rating on 94 per cent of the reports reviewed.

(b) The findings with respect to the use of evaluation were "somewhat positive", given the trend towards preparation of management responses that include action plans. However, "the lack of clear results frameworks and appropriate indicators and baseline information were factors that detracted from UNICEF's effective use of monitoring and evaluation systems." It was noted that "MoRES represents a significant effort to address this issue".

[11] www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/UNICEF%20DE%20Review%20Report%20final%20May%2015.pdf.

(c) UNICEF did not have adequate evaluation coverage of the programming in countries receiving the largest amounts of funding. There was "noticeably limited coverage of UNICEF's humanitarian action".[12]

(d) Gender was adequately addressed in only two thirds of the evaluations sampled.

(e) "Efficiency is not covered systematically in all evaluations," the review found, but coverage of cost efficiency was more systematic. Overall programme costs were not identified in nearly half the evaluations.

(f) UNICEF is investing considerable effort in developing results monitoring systems and in using the results of global evaluations for strategic planning. "These initiatives hold out the promise of strengthened results reporting ... [depending on] how well the evaluation function is able to be incorporated into the system to verify UNICEF's contribution to development results and to test the validity of theories of change".

25. The revised Evaluation Policy responds to the coverage issues noted in the review, and these issues will need special attention in implementation of the policy. In 2016 the Evaluation Office will undertake a comparable review of UNICEF development effectiveness.

Performance against key performance indicators

Indicator 1: Number of evaluations managed and submitted to the global evaluation database

26. In 2013, UNICEF offices completed and submitted 122 evaluations, versus 99 in 2012. This is towards the higher end of the range in recent years, during which 90-140 evaluations have been submitted annually. This number can be expected to increase as the updated requirements on evaluation coverage in the revised Evaluation Policy are taken up in evaluation planning.

27. The annual submission rate of evaluation reports to the global evaluation database has increased from under 30 per cent in 2009 to 71 per cent in 2010 and now to 100 per cent in 2013, on available evidence. An evaluation dashboard incorporated in the Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION) now shows managers the submission rate and other key performance indicators.

Indicator 2: Topical distribution

28. For 2013, a breakdown of topical distribution shows that, over three years, the percentage of sector-specific evaluations has steadily declined and the percentage of multisectoral evaluations has increased (table 1). This may be a reflection of greater use of integrated approaches and broader upstream programming.

[12] This finding was confirmed by the evaluation synthesis report prepared by the Evaluation Office (E/ICEF/2013/15).

Table 1
Topical distribution of evaluation reports, 2010-2013

Topic	*Baseline 2010 percentage*	*2011 percentage*	*2013 percentage*
Sector specific (by key results area of MTSP)	66	55	41
Child survival and development	*25*	*13*	*14*
Education and gender	*15*	*25*	*13*
Child protection	*15*	*10*	*8*
HIV/AIDS	*10*	*4*	*5*
Policy advocacy and partnerships	*1*	*4*	*1*
Programmes covering several sectors	34	25	43
Cross-cutting themes	–	20	10
Organizational performance	–	–	6

Source: GEROS reports 2011-2013.

Indicator 3: Types of evaluations conducted

29. The percentage of evaluations looking primarily at the output level continues to decline, as desired. Evaluations should focus on higher level, more complex results. Output level concerns should be served by monitoring and review processes.

30. The percentage of formative evaluations — those conducted early in the programme cycle to assess whether implementation is unfolding satisfactorily — fell sharply in 2013 compared to 2012 (table 2). It may be that the multidimensional MoRES approach to programme monitoring is beginning to provide much richer data for managers than conventional programme monitoring, thereby reducing the demand for formative and output-level evaluations.

Table 2
Types of evaluations conducted: 2009-2012

	2009	*2011*	*2012*
*By programmatic results level examined**			
Output-level evaluations	33	27	18
Outcome-level evaluations	24	46	30
Impact-level evaluations	43	27	52
*By managerial intent**			
Formative-level evaluations	45	59	24
Summative-level evaluations	55	41	76

* Summative evaluations normally also have some formative elements as well, and impact-level evaluations may also look at output-level issues. This table records their primary purpose.

Indicator 4: Quality of UNICEF evaluations

31. Of all the key performance indicators, the quality ratings have been the most variable from year to year (table 3). The 2013 data show two welcome movements: to the highest ever level of satisfactory/excellent ratings and the lowest level of poor ratings. If these levels persist for one or two more years, UNICEF can be confident that this improvement is sustainable. Progress may be attributable to the gradual absorption of advice provided to staff and to increased attention to evaluation by managers. However, it may also be noted that some variation from year to year can be expected, given the statistically small number of evaluations in each annual batch.

Table 3
Quality of completed evaluations: 2009-2013

	2009	*2012*	*2013*
Quality rating			
Confident to act (*good* or *excellent*)	36	42	62
Almost confident to act (*almost satisfactory*)	34	35	30
Poor	30	23	8

32. The overall quality rating is a synthesis of many specific ratings. Two of these are monitored as sensitive indicators of the mainstreaming of corporate commitments (table 4). Against an ambitious standard, the appropriate incorporation of human rights, gender and equity in evaluations shows an increase. Though the trend is positive, it is less than desired, as noted in the DAC review. Further, little growth is seen in the engagement of all stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests: from a baseline of 40 per cent in 2010 the percentage has hardly moved.

Table 4
Mainstreaming of selected corporate emphases in completed evaluations: 2010-2012

	Percentage of reports attaining a 'good' or 'excellent' rating		
*Corporate emphasis**	*2010*	*2011*	*2012*
Appropriate incorporation of human rights, gender and equity concerns	18	33	44
Engagement of all stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests	40	52	48

* Drawn from among the elements analysed in each report, based on the UNEG quality standards for evaluations.

Indicator 5: Use of evaluation, including management responses

33. The UNICEF Evaluation Policy requires a management response for each evaluation. The submission of management responses reached 90 per cent in 2013

from the 2009 baseline of 10 per cent. Advocacy, training and oversight have together resulted in rapid improvements.

34. Utilization depends not only on preparing the response; implementation is key. Implementation of agreed actions (including actions completed and ongoing) has increased from 57 per cent in 2010 (the first year of the management response tracking system) to 82 per cent in 2011 and 79 per cent in 2012. Further efforts will be made to prompt compliance where actions are lagging.

Indicator 6: Corporate-level evaluations

35. Corporate-level evaluations managed by the Evaluation Office in 2013 are listed in the Executive Board-approved Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (IMEF) 2012-2013. Further details of its implementation appear in the annex, and a summary of results is available on the evaluation web pages of the UNICEF website, along with the completed evaluations.[13]

36. Table 5 shows implementation of corporate evaluations over two biennia. Of the 15 corporate evaluations listed in the 2010-2011 IMEF, 13 were completed and 2 were cancelled in view of data and funding shortfalls.[14] Completion of several evaluations was delayed, which, along with delays in funding allocation, led to a late start in implementation of the 2012-13 IMEF. Staffing gaps following the departure of two senior staff in 2013 also delayed implementation. This has resulted in weak performance against targets set in the 2012-2013 IMEF, with only half of the evaluations completed as planned.

Table 5
Implementation of corporate evaluations

	2010-2011		*2012-2013*	
Plan status	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Scheduled	15	–	14	–
Completed*	10	67	7	50
Under implementation	3	20	1	7
Rescheduled	0	–	6	43
Cancelled	2	13	0	–

* Completed by 31 March in the year following the biennum.

37. A number of steps have already been taken to improve performance. First, core funding for global thematic evaluations has effectively been doubled, providing a strong and predictable basis for evaluation planning and implementation.[15] Second, all evaluations initiated under the 2012-2013 IMEF will be completed in the first quarter of 2014, while other topics have been folded into the new evaluation plan for 2014-2017. This allows a clear approach to the new programme of work. Third, staffing gaps are being addressed through a recruitment campaign backed by

[13] www.unicef.org/evaluation.
[14] See E/ICEF/2012/13.
[15] See section VI, para. 56.

establishment of a "talent pool" to fill future gaps.[16] Fourth, the 2014-2017 plan is intended to be a flexible, rolling plan allowing for annual substitutions if the need arises.

38. The need for such flexibility was demonstrated in 2013, with substantial activity on a wide range of evaluations not listed in the IMEF:

(a) An evaluation synthesis paper on UNICEF humanitarian action,[17] prepared by the Evaluation Office following a request by the Executive Board;[18]

(b) Preparations for an evaluation synthesis paper on UNICEF work in nutrition, for presentation to the Executive Board in 2014;

(c) The two joint evaluations described in section III;

(d) A global thematic synthesis report on the UNICEF approach to community management of acute malnutrition, based on five detailed national case studies, that considers effectiveness, service quality and equity issues in the delivery of therapeutic foods;

(e) An assessment of the evaluability of the programme on peacebuilding, education and advocacy in conflict-affected contexts, which made timely global and country-specific recommendations and informed a programme-wide evaluation strategy for the upcoming years;

(f) Support for several evaluations of humanitarian action, including the review of the fast-track recruitment policy; the real-time evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Mali crisis, led by the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO); and the OCHA-led evaluation of the emergency response fund.

39. While performance on the IMEF evaluations was constrained, it was supplemented by these significant but unscheduled evaluation activities. The plan for global thematic evaluations over the 2014-2017 period now provides a broader and better framework for planning and managing evaluations at the corporate level.

VI. The evaluation function in UNICEF: human and financial resources

40. Effective evaluation presupposes provision of adequate human and financial resources. In this regard, there were positive developments in 2013, linked to the approval of the new Strategic Plan and institutional budget for 2014 to 2017. In this section, information on the human and financial resources available for evaluation in 2013 is compared with baseline data at least two years old to capture trends over time.

Human resources

41. As of December 2013, 100 country offices had professional posts that included evaluation in the job title, compared to 95 offices in 2010 and 85 in 2008. Such posts also existed in all seven regional offices and in all four headquarters locations

[16] See section VI, para. 47.
[17] E/ICEF/2013/15.
[18] E/ICEF/2012/17, decision 2012/12.

(Copenhagen and Florence recently added evaluation posts). Table 6 indicates changes between 2008 and 2013 in the number of evaluation professionals at level 3 posts and higher,[19] including information on levels 1-2 for the first time. Over 60 per cent of all evaluation positions are in the international professional category.

Table 6
Growth in number of UNICEF evaluation professionals, 2008-2011

	12 2008	*12 2011*	*12 2013*	*Growth 2011-2013*
International evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	50	73	95	+30%
National evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	40	41	63	+54%
Evaluation professionals at level 3 or above (total)	**90**	**114**	**158**	**+39%**
Evaluation professionals at level 1 or 2	NR	NR	90	–
Percentage of evaluation professionals in field offices	84%	89%	90%	+1%
Percentage of female evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	42%	44%	50%	+6%
Percentage of female evaluation professionals at levels 1-2	NR	NR	40%	–

Source: Division of Human Resources data, various years.
NR = Not reported.

42. During the past two years the positive trends under way since 2008 have intensified. The growth of nearly 40 per cent in higher level posts is helping UNICEF to meet its corporate commitment to increase skills in evaluation and opportunities for career development in the field. The goal of gender parity has been reached in higher level posts and within the international professional portion of level 1-2 posts.

43. Staffing at level 3 or above is taken as a proxy for capacity to deliver high-quality evaluation. Offices with such posts increased to 78 in 2013 from 61 in 2011 and 53 in 2008. This is a major improvement. However, although a further 22 offices have evaluation staff at levels 1 and 2, around 25 per cent of country offices lack any specialized evaluation staff.

44. It is noteworthy that the growth in posts (39 per cent) over the biennium far exceeds the growth in offices with posts (5 per cent). The most important cause for this disparity is that larger country offices are increasing their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) cadres. This trend is seen in both the largest offices (e.g. Democratic Republic of the Congo, with five posts at level 3 or higher) and mid-sized offices (e.g. Malawi, with two posts).

45. The coincidental need to fill regional M&E officer positions in three regions at the same time prompted a first-ever batch recruitment, involving a global recruitment campaign. Many candidates have been pre-screened for upcoming vacancies at levels 4 and 5. This has created the basis for a talent pool that will help to fill vacant posts and reduce the risk of staffing gaps. This exercise was

[19] Level 3 is the desired minimum level to ensure broad evaluation competence, but it is not required that posts be at or above that level.

co-managed with the Statistics and Monitoring section (now Data & Analytics) to ensure successful candidates could support both monitoring and evaluation functions.

46. Separately, five level-3 evaluation posts were filled through the centrally managed new and emerging talent initiative. In earlier years successful candidates were strong additions to the younger cadre, helping to fill the pipeline for higher level posts.

47. UNICEF continues to monitor the level of evaluation effort. Currently, over 90 per cent of staff members with evaluation responsibilities perform a second function (table 7). However, the percentage performing a third job function has declined slightly, presumably reducing pressures that take time and attention away from evaluation duties.

Table 7
Professional job-function combinations involving evaluation, 2011-2013*

Number of functions in job title	*Combinations observed at level 3 or higher*	*Percentage (number) 2011*	*Percentage (number) 2013*	*Change 2011-2013*
1	• Evaluation	9% (10)	9% (15)	0%
2	• Monitoring and evaluation	63% (72)	68% (106)	+5%
	• Planning and evaluation			
	• Research and evaluation			
3	• Planning, monitoring and evaluation	28% (32)	23% (37)	-4%
	• Social policy, monitoring and evaluation			

Source: Division of Human Resources data, 2014.

* To maintain consistency with the 2011 baseline, these data refer only to posts at level 3 or higher.

48. Staff training and support are important. During 2013 an internal e-learning programme was launched to strengthen the practical capabilities of UNICEF country offices to manage evaluations effectively. Certificates are awarded to staff who successfully complete the course. After doing so, M&E specialists are invited to submit and implement a knowledge application plan to work towards an advanced certificate.

49. In the Evaluation Office, the number of staff positions remained unchanged in 2013, with seven international professional staff (five at P-5 level) and three general service staff. These core positions were supplemented by three other resources-funded international professional posts and two temporary assistance posts. While senior staff prepare and manage evaluations, the Evaluation Office generally contracts consultants to implement them.

50. In allocating human resources for the 2014-2017 period, UNICEF has recognized the need to strengthen the leadership and administration functions in the Evaluation Office. Though it is a small unit, the Evaluation Office is increasingly required to engage regularly with the Executive Board and participate in major

internal processes at headquarters and in facilitating and coordinating evaluation activities across the organization. In fulfilling responsibilities related to system coherence, the office also maintains links to other evaluation offices, professional networks, donors and other stakeholders. While support to the leadership function has long been provided by the P-5 Senior Advisor, two L-3 posts funded by other resources have been created to enhance support, and the G-6 budget assistant post has been upgraded to G-7, in recognition of new responsibilities with VISION.

Financial resources

51. Significant improvements were achieved in 2013 with regard to allocating and tracking financial resources for evaluation. The revised Evaluation Policy set out a clear floor for evaluation expenditure: a minimum of 1 per cent of programme expenditure. This replaced the wider and less clear formulation in the 2008 Evaluation Policy, which suggested dedicating 3 to 5 per cent of programme expenditure to evaluation, studies and research.

52. The revised policy financing requirement can be expected to stimulate increased funding for evaluations at all levels. However, the indicator is rather arbitrary: 1 per cent of programme expenditure yields only a small figure in the many UNICEF offices with small budgets, but in the very biggest country programmes 1 per cent may be excessively high.

53. In 2013, the Executive Board requested UNICEF, while updating the Evaluation Policy, "to track expenditure for the decentralized evaluation function".[20] UNICEF has responded through the recent redesign of the coding guidance, which followed approval of the Strategic Plan. Evaluation is now coded as a discrete cost item, and UNICEF will resume reporting on evaluation spending at all levels in 2015.

54. In the same decision the Executive Board also requested UNICEF to allocate sufficient resources to the Evaluation Office in the institutional budget 2014-2017. UNICEF has allocated significantly increased resources to the office (table 8).

Table 8
Evaluation Office: allocations from core budget

	(In thousands of United States dollars)	
Core budget sources	***2013***	***2014***
Support budget (2013); institutional budget (2014)	2 150	2 160
Regular resources	1 100	2 402*

Source: Division of Finance and Administrative Management.

* Comprises $1.975 million regular resources and $0.427 million institutional budget for non-staff programmatic activities.

55. The allocation of regular resources has doubled, with most of the new funding going to global thematic evaluations. The previous funding gap for global evaluations has been halved, and dependency on other resources to fund evaluations

[20] E/ICEF/2013/13.

is now reduced to a manageable level. Overall, the financing risk for the work of the Evaluation Office has been very significantly reduced.

VII. Strengthening evaluation within UNICEF: the regional link

Introduction

56. This section reports on evaluation activities at regional offices, which play a critical role in the decentralized structure and the decentralized evaluation system.[21] There are currently 17 professionals in the seven regional offices who have evaluation in their job title, and half of these are found in the two offices in Africa (five in WCARO and four in the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office [ESARO]). This cadre normally also has substantial monitoring and planning responsibilities, although the regional offices for South Asia (ROSA) and East Asia and the Pacific (EAPRO) have created full-time evaluation positions.

57. Regional offices are making intelligent adaptations to their particular regional and institutional locations. Illustrated with specific examples, this section shows why the Evaluation Policy reflects the decentralized structure of UNICEF and how regional offices are using the flexibility this provides. The following subsections are organized according to the regional-level accountabilities contained in the policy.

Governance and accountability

58. The overall approach of evaluation work in each region is jointly decided by the regional office and the country offices, mainly by the regional management team, reinforced by technical network meetings. Some regions have established specific goals and accountabilities to complement the global Evaluation Policy. Reacting to notable differences in the treatment of evaluation among different country offices in the region, the ROSA evaluation strategy, for instance, sets responsibilities, targets and indicators in four areas:

(a) Integrating evaluation in results-based management;

(b) Planning evaluations through integrated M&E plans;

(c) Managing and assuring the quality of evaluations;

(d) Developing national evaluation capacity.

59. Similarly, WCARO has developed a four-year evaluation strategy focused on five objectives.

60. In contrast, ESARO has concluded that it is sufficient to operate "within the framework of the global Evaluation Policy and related guidelines.... The Country Representatives treasure the decentralized evaluation function as specified in the Evaluation Policy and take responsibility for evaluations in countries, with the regional office serving as a resource for quality assurance and technical support," according to the ESARO evaluation strategy.

[21] For further details of the decentralized evaluation function, see the revised Evaluation Policy (E/ICEF/2013/14, especially paragraphs 38-60).

61. Regional management teams agree on the governance and accountability roles within the region and normally require that key performance information be reported to managers at several levels. For example, the Middle East and North Africa regional office (MENARO) has developed its own scorecard covering key items.

62. The decentralized structure of UNICEF allows for such variations, as long as the overall tenets of the Evaluation Policy are kept in view. The differing resource levels, regional strengths and weaknesses, and expectations of UNICEF and other stakeholders are strong reasons to retain the high levels of flexibility exercised by regional offices.

Guidance and quality assurance

63. All regional offices emphasize their role in supporting country offices to deliver high-quality evaluations by providing overall guidance and specific quality assurance processes. When building on global guidance, the regional offices face choices in three related areas:

(a) *How active to be at the country office level.* Regional offices can effectively become technical partners of the country offices as they develop their M&E plans. Seeking coverage and quality improvements, EAPRO (and similarly the regional office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS)] supports country offices as they develop their integrated M&E plans through these steps:

(i) The country office staff develops mini concept notes for evaluation/research activities.

(ii) The country office M&E section maps all proposals.

(iii) Senior management discusses the proposals to identify information gaps, duplication, synergies for greater efficiency and coverage, and funding requirements, etc., and sets priorities, taking account of the overall balance among evaluations, studies and research.

(iv) For successful proposals, the suitability of the methodology is quality reviewed.

(b) *How much regional office capacity to mobilize in support of country office efforts.* Several regional offices review the terms of reference for every evaluation conducted by country offices, whereas others are more selective. Within regional offices, the support given may extend beyond the M&E section or focus on particular issues. In 2013, for example:

(i) WCARO ensured that all terms of reference, inception reports and final reports were reviewed by the technical sections (e.g. health, education) as well as the M&E section. This approach "leverages all sections at CO and regional office level, and sets a good stage for quality evaluation and, importantly, for coordinated management response and use," its strategy noted.

(ii) The CEE/CIS regional office added a quality review step to ensure that "evaluations adequately reflect and incorporate human rights, equity, and gender equality issues", according to the strategy.

(c) *When to engage external technical support.* The time demands and specialized sectoral expertise required for effective quality assurance of large numbers of country-level evaluations may overwhelm regional office resources. Following best practice initiated by CEE/CIS in 2009, three regions now contract with an external service provider or facility to review terms of reference and sometimes other outputs against best practice evaluation norms. The facilities are also sometimes asked to add sectoral experts to critique the theory of change, evaluation objectives and analytic approaches. In the spirit of national capacity development, one objective in the ROSA strategy is to develop regional centres to fill this role in order to reduce dependence on northern-based experts.

Conducting evaluations

64. Regional offices also conduct multi-country and thematic evaluations. They have been remarkably active in this field, commissioning evaluations addressing the following topics:

(a) Capacity development in emergency preparedness and response and disaster risk reduction in education; and nutrition security partnerships in Africa (ESARO);

(b) Social protection, with case studies in Algeria and Tunisia (MENARO);

(c) Sahel nutrition emergency response; and real-time evaluation of the Mali emergency response (WCARO);

(d) Decentralization; and nutrition (EAPRO);

(e) Adolescent programming (ROSA);

(f) Child care reform; juvenile justice; early learning/school readiness; inclusion of out-of-school children in quality learning; and infant and under-five mortality (CEE/CIS).

65. Overall, this represents a high level of productivity, especially considering that these evaluations are being produced by staff performing many other tasks. Further, country and regional office talents are knitted together, this work is being managed to generate a broader reach and higher quality than more narrowly scoped evaluations. This is seen particularly in CEE/CIS, where the regional office works in a set of middle-income countries with country offices that generally have small budgets and limited M&E staffing. The governance arrangements for their multi-country evaluations are exacting, requiring:

(a) Verification that the topic fits within the regional knowledge and leadership agenda;

(b) Application within the evaluation design of the equity-focused determinant analysis "to support the strengthening of policies and systems … to identify which bottlenecks were removed and how";

(c) Sequential timing of multi-country evaluations to "take advantage of knowledge spillover and maximize regional office resources";

(d) Engagement of stakeholders from country, regional and headquarters offices, including the Evaluation Office;

(e) Engagement of external experts as peer reviewers;

(f) Use of standardized review templates for quality reviews of interim products;

(g) "Clearance of key outputs by the Regional Evaluation Management Committee (chaired by the Regional Director)," which is given only when the external facility scores it as good quality;

(h) Progress reviews within multiple venues including the regional management team and regional networks.

66. Regionally led evaluations are consistently highly rated by the GEROS external reviewers. It is reported that management responses and utilization are also good. Further, lessons learned in managing and following up on regional evaluations can be directly applied at country level through the regional office quality assurance role.

Partnerships

67. Regional offices are asked to foster partnerships at a scale to benefit the entire region, based on wider contacts, but they can be challenging to manage. Even partnerships within the United Nations system must be carefully nurtured, given their different mandates and resources. Partnerships for evaluation are no exception.

68. Evaluation partnerships at regional office level pursue a variety of purposes:

(a) For quality assurance of regional and country level evaluations, through external facilities;

(b) For the conduct of priority research and evaluation efforts, such as the MENARO region-wide partnership with PEP/Laval University (Canada) on policy impact analysis;

(c) For strengthening the M&E capacity of United Nations staff and programmatic counterparts through on-site and distance learning, notably ROSA's support for training M&E focal points in United Nations country teams;

(d) For capacity strengthening of the broad evaluation community through global and regional networking, often in coordination with headquarters efforts, using regional and global evaluation associations and networks.

Development and professionalization of the UNICEF evaluation function

69. Regional offices and headquarters collaborate with other agencies to support organizations and networks engaged in strengthening evaluation capacity, including most recently EvalPartners. While such bodies have a primary function to support national evaluation capacities, the learning and training resources are available to UNICEF staff as well. Regional offices make a point of informing M&E staff about these networks and resources, encouraging online learning and promoting attendance at regional association meetings.

70. When more specific needs are identified, regional offices create customized solutions, for example:

(a) Undertaking a structured review of country office M&E capacities during mission visits, followed by a tailored training (ROSA);

(b) Prioritizing the improvement of the M&E function in busy and high-spending country offices. In ESARO, the M&E section worked closely with nine country offices to strengthen in-house M&E capacity and establish research and evaluation committees;

(c) Engaging country office M&E officers as peer reviewers in the quality assurance system led by the regional office, including by coaching peer reviewers and providing feedback on their efforts (WCARO);

(d) Re-profiling country office M&E posts in support of the evolving M&E needs of offices when vacancies provide a recruitment/review opportunity (CEE/CIS);

(e) Offering region-wide and country-specific training on regionally important M&E topics, such as management of equity-focused evaluations (WCARO).

71. The regional inter-agency United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific has organized a course on evaluation in the United Nations context in the ROSA and EAPRO regions. Now in its fourth iteration, it has provided training in equity-focused evaluations.

National evaluation capacity development

72. Regional offices employ both broad and customized solutions to developing national evaluation capacity. Broad solutions include fostering national and regional evaluation associations, organizing association conferences and linking with global evaluation networks.[22]

73. The customized solutions typically affect one nation or partner that cannot find answers to its issues in more general efforts. The regional offices build links with resources beyond national borders and advise on how to establish sustainable systems to reach specific goals. Recent initiatives include:

(a) Partnering with the CLEAR Initiative[23] (which supports regional centres to provide in-region capacity development and technical assistance on M&E and performance management) to develop the M&E skills of counterparts, particularly among public sector ministries (WCARO, ROSA);

(b) Supporting government-led efforts to create an evaluation capacity development strategy, including at subnational levels (EAPRO, ROSA);

(c) Supporting efforts to develop a process to certify national evaluation professionals by brokering a connection between an evaluation association with relevant experience in Canada and an ambitious national association in Thailand (EAPRO);

(d) Pairing national evaluators with experienced international evaluators to build a cadre of national evaluators (WCARO).

[22] These have been described in previous annual reports, particularly those of 2012 (E/ICEF/2012/13), paragraphs 49-54, and 2013 (E/ICEF/2013/13), paragraphs 66-74.

[23] Regional Centres for Learning on Evaluation and Results.

Summary

74. The diversity of approaches and particularly emphases also presents an opportunity for sharing among regions. This already occurs, for example, in growing use of external quality assurance facilities. The annual meeting for senior M&E staff provides another opportunity to exchange experiences and knowledge.

75. Given limited staff and budgets, the range and complexity of evaluation efforts led by regional offices is impressive. Nevertheless, the decentralized structure of UNICEF — with support from headquarters and a guiding corporate policy — remains well adapted to generating, sharing and using effective evaluation practice at the regional level.

VIII. Conclusion: challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNICEF

76. This report has presented evidence of continued improvement in the UNICEF evaluation function, including its roles in supporting harmonization within the United Nations on evaluation issues and the wider agenda around national evaluation capacity development. The report has also noted that effective implementation of the revised Evaluation Policy will be critical in maintaining momentum towards evaluation excellence at all levels.

77. The Strategic Plan provides orientation for all UNICEF activities, and evaluation is no exception. The key challenge for evaluation across UNICEF in the coming four years will be to contribute meaningfully to further improvements in the performance of UNICEF and its partners in meeting the challenges ahead and in helping to build a better world for children around the globe.

IX. Draft decision

The Executive Board,

1. *Takes note* of the annual report on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2014/12) and the accompanying paper providing management's perspective on the issues raised in the report;

2. *Reaffirms* the central role played by the evaluation function in UNICEF and the importance of the principles set out in the revised Evaluation Policy (E/ICEF/2013/14);

3. *Welcomes* the evidence presented in the report of continued strengthening of the evaluation function and *encourages* UNICEF to continue to systematically apply the revised Evaluation Policy;

4. *Takes note* of the key performance indicators tracking the effectiveness of the evaluation system and the administrative data on human and financial resources;

5. *Notes* the effective contribution of regional offices within the highly decentralized evaluation system of UNICEF;

6. *Requests* UNICEF to report in 2015 on steps taken to implement the revised Evaluation Policy and on implementation of the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017.

Annex

Global thematic evaluations

Progress in implementing the 2012-2013 integrated monitoring and evaluation framework

(Status as at 27 January 2014)

Title of global evaluation	Status	Comment
1. Multiple indicator cluster surveys	Implementation	Completion expected in 3/14
2. Formative evaluation of MoRES	Implementation	Completion expected 3/14
3. Cluster lead agency role in humanitarian action	Completed	
4. Child protection in emergencies	Completed	
5. Community approaches for total sanitation	Implementation	Completion expected 2/14
6. Emergency preparedness systems	Implementation	Completion expected 2/14
7. Upstream work in the education sector	Implementation	Completion expected 3/14
8. Violence against children	Implementation	Completion expected 11/14
9. Preventing stunting	Reprogrammed	Reprogrammed to 2015 Plus: synthesis of existing evaluation evidence in nutrition: 05/14
10. Social protection	Reprogrammed	Reprogrammed to 2015
11. Advocacy and policy change	Reprogrammed	Reprogrammed to 2014
12. Application of results-based management	Superseded	Evaluability of Strategic Plan exercise deemed more critical.
13. Communication for development	Reprogrammed	Reprogrammed to 2014
14. National capacity development	Reprogrammed	Reprogrammed to 2015

Implementation: Work under way; analysis in process
Completed: Final report delivered; dissemination under way
Reprogrammed: Rescheduled for a later date
Superseded: Original emphasis has shifted to a modified, higher priority